



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

National enforcement operation nets 116 gang and criminal arrests in New Jersey *Arrests are result of Operation Return to Sender*

NEWARK, NJ – Working closely with other law enforcement agencies in New Jersey, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) special agents and officers targeted foreign national gang members, drug dealers, fugitives and other criminals in a major national operation which resulted in the arrest of 116 dangerous and wanted aliens. The office of investigations made sixty-three arrests and the ICE fugitive operations team apprehended 53 fugitives.

As part of the operation ICE dismantled a narcotics trafficking organization working closely with gang members in Plainfield, NJ.

The national operation was dubbed “Operation Return to Sender,” which began on May 26, 2006 and concluded yesterday. Virtually every field office in the nation from ICE’s Office of Investigations and ICE’s Office of Detention and Removal Operations carried out the enforcement operation in conjunction with numerous state and local law enforcement agencies. Among the 2,179 individuals arrested in the operation, roughly half had criminal records for crimes that ranged from sexual assault of a minor to assault with a deadly weapon, to abduction.

In New Jersey ICE agents arrested Douglas Melgar-Rivera (AKA “Plo Plo”) who is the leader of the Plainfield MS-13, the largest clique of MS-13 known to law enforcement in the state.

The narcotics ring operating in Plainfield imported cocaine directly from Guatemala and supplied the drugs to local MS-13 gang members and associates who distributed it on the street. Three gang associates have been charged federally with conspiracy to distribute cocaine and four are charged under New Jersey State law with distribution of a controlled substance. The other 16 gang members and associates are being held on immigration charges for being illegally in the United States.

Kyle Hutchins, special agent in charge of ICE’s office of investigations in Newark said, “Operation Return to Sender is a clear message that ICE and our law enforcement partners will seek out and arrest gang members, associates and other criminal aliens who are destroying the quality of life and endangering public safety in New Jersey. This operation would not have been as successful without the assistance of the men and women of a number of state, county and local law enforcement agencies.”

During the course of the intensive two-and-a-half week operation ICE worked closely with the Red Bank Police Department, Plainfield Police Department, Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office, Middlesex County Sheriff's Office, Morris County Sheriff's Office, Morristown Police Department, the FBI and the United State's Attorney's Office.

Plainfield Mayor Sharon Robinson-Briggs said, "We welcomed the opportunity to work closely with ICE to identify criminal gang elements in the City of Plainfield. When gang members move into communities they bring with them negative quality of life issues which tarnish our community and compromise the public safety."

Facing federal criminal charges of conspiracy to distribute a controlled substance are:

- Jhony Valiente-Turcios, 26 of Guatemala.
- Willin Alexander Perez, 30 of Guatemala.
- Carlos Alexander Sagastume-Sagastume, 23 of Guatemala.

Facing New Jersey charges of distributing a controlled substance are:

- Alberto Rodriguez, AKA "Beto", 26 of Dominican Republic
- Miguel Angel Carrera-Castro, 24 of Guatemala.
- Milton Vargas-Olive, 29 of Guatemala.
- Jose Luis Aguillar, 32 of Guatemala.

Also as part of Operation Return to Sender ICE agents and local officers arrested 22 members of Los Cafeteros and Sureno 13 in Red Bank. All of the gang members are being held on immigration charges. Many of the individuals being detained have criminal records in New Jersey. The operation in Red Bank was the result of an intensive investigation involving local and federal authorities to identify and target gang members operating in the community.

Monmouth County Prosecutor Luis A. Valentin stated, "The gang problem in New Jersey generally and Monmouth County specifically has increased dramatically in recent years. It is necessary that we form true partnerships amongst federal, state, county and municipal law enforcement agencies to protect our communities and our children. An operation such as this ultimately serves to increase public safety."

In addition to the arrests of gang members and associates, the Newark office of Detention and Removal also apprehended 53 wanted fugitives and individuals who are in violation of an order of removal. Raymond A. Simonse, acting Field Office Director said, "ICE will continue to vigorously pursue individuals who defy U.S. immigration law. Fugitives should not be surprised when ICE officers arrest them for disobeying a judges deportation order."

The arrests are the latest enforcement actions under the interior immigration enforcement strategy that was announced on April 20, 2006 by Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff and Assistant Secretary Myers. A critical element of this interior enforcement strategy is to identify and remove criminal aliens, fugitives, and other immigration violators from the United States.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.